***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 27:***

# *Pieces of Eight*

***Brief Summary:***

* At the top of the mast, Jim has a great view of the sea below him – and of Israel Hands's body up against the side of the ship.
* Jim feels sick and frightened.
* The knife in his shoulder is making him bleed, but it's Israel Hands's dead body that's really getting to him.
* Jim shudders and the knife comes loose – really, it barely hit him.
* He climbs down to the deck and bandages his injury as best he can.
* Jim decides to push O'Brien's body overboard while he's at it. He sees the two bodies of the former enemies lying entwined.
* Jim is alone on the ship.
* He climbs over the side of the *Hispaniola* and starts making his way back to the fort.
* It's getting darker and darker, and Jim is starting to have trouble finding his way.
* The moon rises and Jim gets really turned around. He finds himself at the edge of a clearing where there are signs of a bonfire that has burned down.
* He starts crawling on his hands and knees toward the fort.
* Jim is surprised that no one has stopped him yet – shouldn't they be guarding the stockade?
* He walks into the fort and trips on something in the dark. It's the leg of someone sleeping.
* A shrill voice suddenly calls out, "Pieces of eight!" over and over again.
* It's Captain Flint, Long John Silver's parrot.
* Everyone wakes up and Long John Silver asks who it is.
* Several hands catch Jim so he can't get away.
* Dick, the youngest pirate, brings a light out to see what's going on.

***Synopsis:***

The knife still pinning him against the mast, Jim watches as Hands’s body rises once in the water and then sinks down. Covered in blood but not seriously wounded, Jim initially feels faint and terrified but manages to regain his composure. Shuddering, he frees himself by ripping the bit of shoulder skin that the knife has pinned to the mast. He climbs down the mast to care for his wound and, seeing the dead Irishman on deck, pushes him overboard and watches the body in the water.

Now alone on the ship, Jim decides that he is close enough to the island to swim to shore safely. He reaches the island and treks through the woods in search of Captain Smollett’s stockade on the other side of the island. He finally glimpses the glow of a fire in the distance, and finds that it is coming from campfires in the stockade. Jim is surprised that Smollett would allow such a waste of firewood. Creeping into the stockade, Jim finds the men asleep. A voice suddenly cries out, “Pieces of eight!” and Jim recognizes the voice of Silver’s parrot, Cap’n Flint. Realizing that the pirates have taken over the stockade, Jim tries to flee but is held tight.

***Summary:***Seeing Hands' body lying under the shallow water of the bay (Chapter 27, "Pieces of Eight"), Jim tears free from the knife, returns to deck to tend his wound, which is not deep, and manages to heave O'Brien's body overboard to lie beside that of Hands. Then, as the sun sets, the tide turns, and a wind begins to rise, Jim does what he can to bring down the sails so that the ship will not be damaged by being blown about. When this is done, he drops down from the cut hawser into waist-deep water and wades ashore. Feeling proud of having recaptured the ship, he starts in the direction of the stockade, crosses a stream, and, seeing a fire in the distance, supposes it is Ben Gunn's camp. The moon comes up and he approaches the stockade, where he sees the embers of another fire dying in the yard. This puzzles him, and he climbs over the palisade and crawls toward the blockhouse cautiously. Then he hears from inside the snores of sleeping men and, reassured, enters the building, thinking to lie down in his own place and surprise his friends when they awaken. But he manages to step on one sleeper, and in the ensuing confusion (he hears Silver's parrot screaming "Pieces of eight!"), he realizes that he has stumbled into the pirates' stronghold; they have somehow taken it over while he has been gone. He turns to run but is held fast, captured by the pirates.

***Critical Study(Ch25-27):***

Jim’s authority continues to grow in these chapters. His taking control of the ship in Chapter XXV and declaration to Israel Hands that he should be addressed as captain demonstrate Jim’s meteoric rise in prestige. He has promoted himself from cabin boy to captain on one single voyage. This quick ascent to power is as central to Jim’s adventure as the search for treasure, and is perhaps more important; Jim, unlike the adults, devotes hardly any thought to the treasure itself or the life of leisure it can buy. As Jim stumbles into stockade and hears the parrot scream “[p]ieces of eight,” we recall that the gold coins are the mutineers’—as well as Squire Trelawney’s—highest goal. These “[p]ieces of eight” are not the catchphrase of Jim’s own quest, however, as he is less interested in loot than in proving his worth as a hero and a man.

Jim and Hands’s struggle on deck is more than a match between the good and the bad. Stevenson also gives the fight symbolic value, using it to highlight the contrast between the self-aware Jim and the self-destructive and reckless Hands. Indeed, Jim repeatedly takes firm control of his surroundings in these chapters. He tells Hands outright that he has taken possession of the ship, and later, after the fight, waits a while to climb down from the mast until, as he remarks, “I was once more in possession of myself.” Hands, in sharp contrast, is unable to take possession of anything. The ship he is supposedly guarding is cut adrift and blowing about wildly while he lies on the deck drunk. Indeed, Hands’s loss of control over the vessel mirrors his loss of control over himself. The symbolism of alcohol is again apparent: drunkenness, more than causing mere bodily intoxication, represents a total inability to maintain control of one’s own life.

Jim’s treatment of the dead Irishman’s body in Chapter XXVII is unexpected, given his objection, in the preceding chapter, to Hands’s suggestion that they push the corpse overboard. Jim’s heaving the body into the sea without hesitation leaves us to wonder whether he had merely been pretending to care about the Irishman’s eternal soul. Jim’s lack of solemnity is even more jarring when contrasted with the tears Squire Trelawney sheds over Tom’s dead body in Chapter XVIII. Stevenson implies that respect for the dead is a mark of proper upbringing. Granted, the Irishman is Jim’s enemy, but his coldness toward the corpse is nonetheless uncharacteristic. These instances when Jim seems to straddle the line between the civilized men and the pirates make his character more interesting and complex. His sudden piratelike behavior causes us to question how conventional or complete Jim’s civic and spiritual development has been.

***Significance:***

Jim's decision after the attack to leave the stockade — for no apparent reason — is another instance of impulsive behavior, foreshadowed by his earlier having joined the shore party. It is necessary to the plot, in order for him to decide later to take Ben Gunn's boat and cut the ship loose, but, in fact, the whole episode would seem to have been contrived to allow Jim, as protagonist, really to act rather than simply to observe or follow orders. When he does so, Jim's reckless behavior callously leaves only three men at the stockade and only Trelawney and Gray able to defend against another attack, should one come. (Silver has taken one of that morning's attackers back to the ship, leaving only a few mutineers on shore for the time being, but Jim does not discover this until after his desertion of his friends.) Thus this instance of his impulsiveness is much more serious — and much more dangerous — than the previous one, and he will be reproved for it later; indeed, he will reprove himself.

This part contains a small editorial oversight: Jim sees Silver at the ship, talking with Israel Hands and the man whose name he'll later learn is O'Brien. Then he says that Silver has returned to shore in the jolly-boat. Actually, Silver is in one of the two gigs that the mutineers took to go ashore the previous day; the pirates later destroyed the smaller jolly-boat to make sure that Captain Smollett and his group couldn't use it again.

In order to follow the action of these chapters, you need to recall the geography of the island, the location of the ship in the southern anchorage, and the effects of the tides and ocean currents. Under cover of darkness and fog, Jim takes his little boat to the ship where it lies at anchor in the strait. When he cuts the ship loose from its anchor, the outgoing ebb tide sweeps both vessels eastward into the open sea. The strong westerly current then carries them both west across the southern tip of Skeleton Island and north along Treasure Island's western shore, with the ship initially moving faster than Jim's boat but then, under sail, caught between wind and current and going nowhere, so that Jim catches up with it in the morning. Having abandoned the boat and boarded the ship, with Hands to direct him, Jim steers north to a small cove (North Inlet) where he can beach the ship. They must wait for high tide to take it close enough so that it will be left aground when the tide goes out. The deserted and wrecked ship they see there has remained more or less intact, which lets them know that there is no strong current in the inlet.

Glossary

biscuit ship biscuit or hardtack, unleavened bread made in very hard, large wafers.

French leave an unauthorized, unnoticed, or unceremonious departure.

coracle a short, roundish boat of skins or waterproofed canvas stretched over a wood or wicker frame.

hawser a large rope used for towing or mooring a ship.

astern behind a ship.

yaw to swing back and forth across its course, as a ship pushed by waves.

made sure was sure; Jim uses the phrase in this sense, rather than in the more modern sense of "took action to ensure."

contrariety the condition of being contrary (in opposition); here, the wind and current are in the same direction.

jib a triangular sail secured to a stay forward of the foremast.

water-breaker a small water keg.

tiller a bar or handle for turning the rudder of a boat or ship.

forefoot the meeting point of the keel and the stem of a ship.

jib-boom the boom of the jib; the spar extending from its mast or stay to hold the bottom of the jib outstretched.

bulkhead any of the upright partitions separating parts of a ship.

gill a unit of liquid measure equal to ¼ pint or 4 fluid ounces.

a rank Irelander a low Irishman; "rank" may be used as an adjective in several senses, including "offensive-smelling" and "complete; utter;" Hands may be using it in either or both of these senses, to express his dislike of the Irish.

ankecher handkerchief.

Execution Dock a wharf on the north bank of the river Thames at Wapping, in London, the traditional place for execution by hanging of pirates.

dared not beach her Because Jim has cut away the anchor, they must beach the ship (ground it on a beach) in order to keep it stationary, but they must wait to do this until the tide has come in enough so that they can steer close to shore where the ebbing tide will not wash the ship back out to sea.

dirk a long, straight dagger.

Long Tom the "long nine," the ship's gun.

my long home the grave; a euphemism for death.

narrow and shoal narrow and shallow.

subaltern a subordinate officer.

a-blowing like a garding blooming like a garden.

starboard. . . larboard to the right . . . to the left.

luff to turn the bow of a ship toward the wind.

a red ensign a red flag or banner.

priming used here in the sense of the primer, the powder used to set off the pistol's shot.

mizzen shrouds the ropes stretched from the ship's side to the head of the mizzenmast to offset lateral strain on the mast.

crosstrees two short bars across a ship's masthead to spread the rigging that supports the mast.

I'll have to strike I'll have to strike my colors or take down my flag; Hands means he will have to give up and acknowledge that Jim has won.

younker a youngster.

cordage cords and ropes collectively, especially the ropes in a ship's rigging.

halyards ropes for raising or lowering flags, sails, and so on.

the downhaul a rope for hauling down a sail; the sail Jim wants to bring in is in the water, so that Jim is not strong enough to move it.

***Critical Analysis:***

Jim hangs at the top of the mast, perilously, looking at Hands body go up and down in the sea, amongst the blood and foam of the sea. For a while, he clings desperately to the mast, trying to hold on. The knife that Hands had thrown at him barely hit him but Jim fails when he tries to pull the knife out. Shuddering violently afterwards, he is lucky that this action displays the blade from his body. Jim finally climbs down the starboard shrouds and binds his wound, finding that it is neither deep nor dangerous. After throwing O'Brien's body overboard, the young narrator secures the boat and wades ashore, leaving the boat for Captain Smollett.

When he gets to land, he tries to head for the stockade, hoping that his absence will be forgiven because he has secured the boat. After some time, the views a glow against the sky and assumes that the fire is a sign of Ben Gunn cooking dinner, but he wonders why the strange man is not afraid that Long John Silver will find the fire. As he finally reaches the stockade, Jim slows down because he is afraid that he will shot by his companions. Reaching the stockade, Jim realizes that no one is on watch and he feels bad for abandoning his friends and consequently leaving them short-handed. Finally, as he reaches the clearing in front of the house, he is surprised to see the remnants of a fire, something that the captain would have never permitted them to do while Jim as with them. Planning on surprising his friends, he sneaks into the house but as he stumbles on one of the sleeping bodies, he hears a voice repeat "Pieces of eight!" Jim runs out of the house, and Silver calls for someone to bring a torch.

The symbolism and foreshadowing of the chapter's name, is the first notable aspect of this chapter. Robert Louis Stevenson's use of foreshadowing in this chapter is again at its peak, a literary technique which increases the suspense of the chapter. As soon as Jim sets foot on the island, he and the reader, are given two signs that all is not well with his comrades - both having to do with the fire. That, accompanied by the titles name, "Pieces of Silver," increases the anxiety and anticipation that again, something bad is going to happen to Jim and all is not well with his comrades.

Once again, the theme of the unimportance and lack of sadness at death is explored as the death of Israel Hands leaves another person dead at the account of the treasure hunt. At the beginning of the chapter, the thing that most worries Jim is not that he just killed a man, his first of such actions, but instead that he might join him in the ocean. He is brave and not a bit remorseful about the death, instead, like a true action-hero, he is only worried about saving his own life and continuing with the quest at hand. This attitude is even expressed by Jim as he throws O'Brien's body overboard, he notes that "the habit of tragical adventures had worn almost all my terror for the dead."

Robert Louis Stevenson's descriptions in this part of the book are again superb. The mood that he creates in the beginning of the chapter is lonely and somber, as Jim leaves the death and destruction of the ship behind. Clearly, though, the reader realizes that something as wrong. As he proceeds to the interior of the island, however, the mood switches to hope and anticipation at meeting his friends and telling them about his adventures. Although the reader remembers the ominous, combined with the foreshadowing mentioned before, Jim is still hopeful until the very end when he realizes that he has stumbled upon Long John Silver and his men.

***Notes:***Jim is still pinned by the shoulder to the mizzenmast. His thoughts turn to the dirk in his shoulder and the idea of pulling it out causes him to shudder—a movement violent enough to tear away the pinch of skin pierced by the knife. Jim realizes he is bleeding, but not really hurt. Jim's goal now is to secure the ship before returning to the stockade.

Reaching the stockade, Jim is surprised to find an untended bonfire outside and the darkened block-house filled with sounds of snoring. Sneaking in, with the idea of sleeping in his accustomed place, he is shocked to hear Cap'n Flint begin to scream, "Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!" The occupants of the block-house turn out to be the mutineers, and Jim promptly becomes their prisoner.

The main purpose of this chapter is to push Jim into the next phase of his adventure. He focuses on the job of securing the *Hispaniola* and trusts to luck that he's done well enough. Returning to the stockade to share his victory with his companions, he hopes they will appreciate that his truancy has paid off. His pride in a job well done is not unwarranted. He has acted courageously and out of a sense of duty to others, and eliminated a very dangerous mutineer in the process.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) bobs up to the surface once, then sinks again, not to reappear. Once [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) is certain he’s dead, he begins to feel faint and frightened, sensing his own blood, and fearing his own fall into the water. He clings to the mast and shuts his eyes until he regains his composure. He can’t manage to pull out the knife, but as he shudders he frees himself from the knife, which had mostly pinned his clothing. He eases out of his shirt, and lowers himself to the deck.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Jim has used all the quick wits and courage at his disposal during the fight with the pirate, but only now, with the immediate danger behind him, does he fully recognize the major stakes of what he’s done. Still, he continues to be forced to find a way out of his predicaments alone, without the captain or other adults.

***Summary part 2:***

It turns out that [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins)’s wound is not too deep, though painful. Jim sees [O’Brien](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) sprawled against the bulwarks. His latest adventure has rid him of his fear of the dead, so he grabs O’Brien and throws him overboard, where he lies next to [Hands](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) on the sea floor. Then Jim cuts the halyards (ropes) so that part of the mainsail is no longer underwater: loose canvas floats down to lie across the surface, but Jim can’t tug the downhall rope to move the mast any more, so he leaves it, trusting the Hispaniola to luck.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Earlier, Jim hadn’t wanted to throw the body overboard, and Hands was too superstitious to agree to do so. This latest adventure has made Jim more mature in that he understands that living beings are far more potentially dangerous than dead bodies. He’s also learned that in some affairs, it’s luck more than skill or ability that will determine an outcome.

***Summary Part 3:***

A chill begins to sweep the shore, and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) looks about him, wading ashore and congratulating himself on rescuing the ship for his men (despite his sneaky behavior). He hopes that even [Captain Smollett](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett) might forgive him. In high spirits, he sets off for the log-house, passing by where he had met [Ben Gunn](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn). Suddenly the light of a moonbeam reaches him, lighting up the Spy-glass hill, and Jim hurries on, the moon climbing higher and higher.

***Analysis Part 3:***

As Jim reaches the shore, he remembers that he was never given permission to leave the camp, and he may well face consequences or at least disapproval—but he hopes that the rescue of the Hispaniola might be enough to make up for his immature behavior, and he’s confident enough in this possibility to renew his spirits.

***Summary Part 4:***Finally [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) reaches the borders of the clearing: it’s entirely silent. Beginning to fear that something has gone wrong, he crawls towards the house, and at the sound of snoring is relieved. He reaches the door, walks inside, and hits the leg of a man sleeping. Suddenly he hears a shrill voice shouting “Pieces of eight!”—it’s [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver)’s [parrot](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint-parrot). With no time to run, Jim backs into a man, who grabs him and holds him while [Silver](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver) has one of his men fetch a torch.

***Analysis Part 4:***Although Jim has learned not to be overly trusting, here his guard slips, as he assumes he is about to find himself safely back with his friends. Then, however, Captain Flint (the parrot) once again signals the presence of the fearful pirate, and it turns out that Jim is the unlucky one this time.